

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 083315  
ORIGIN HA-05

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 NEA-10 ISO-00 SSO-00 SS-15 L-03  
PA-01 CA-01 VO-05 NSC-05 CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00  
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-----065816 312025Z /45

P R 311950Z MAR 78  
FM SECSTATE WASHDC  
TO USINT BAGHDAD PRIORITY  
INFO AMEMBASSY ATHENS  
AMEMBASSY ROME

C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 083315

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SREF, IZ, SHUM, CVIS

SUBJECT: GROUP OF 34 IRAQI CHRISTIAN ASYLUM SEEKERS

1. WE HAVE COMPLETED REVIEWS OF ALL ASYLUM APPLICATIONS SUBMITTED BY GROUP OF 34 IRAQI CHRISTIANS WHO ARRIVED AT JFK WITHOUT VISAS ABOARD AN AIR MOROCCO AIRCRAFT ON JANUARY 28, 1978. IT IS OUR VIEW THAT NONE HAS ESTABLISHED A WELL-FOUNDED FEAR OF PERSECUTION BASED UPON RELIGIOUS OR ANY OTHER GROUNDS PRIOR TO THEIR DEPARTURE FROM IRAQ. HOWEVER, DUE TO THE INTENSITY OF THE GOI PUBLIC REACTION TO THIS SPECIFIC INCIDENT, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE FOR US TO ASSURE THE IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE THAT MEMBERS OF THIS GROUP COULD RETURN TO IRAQ WITHOUT EXPERIENCING SOME HARASSMENT OR OTHERWISE BE CONFIDENTIAL

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SUBJECT TO REPRISALS IMMEDIATELY UPON THEIR RETURN TO IRAQ OR AT A LATTER DATE.

2. THE FOLLOWING IS THE SUBSTANTIVE TEXT OF OUR REPLY TO THE INS ON THESE CASES:

"UPON CAREFUL REVIEW OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES INVOLVED

IN THIS GROUP'S ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES, IT  
IS OUR VIEW THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED  
TO IRAQ. THIS VIEW IS NOT BASED ON THE APPLICANTS

CLAIMS THAT THEY FEAR PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THEIR  
RELIGIOUS BELIEFS IF RETURNED TO IRAQ."

"REPRESENTATIVES OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
IN IRAQ HAVE BEEN CLOSELY MONITORING THE SITUATION  
IN THAT COUNTRY AND BELIEVE THAT THE POSITION OF THE  
CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ HAS UNDERGONE MARKED  
IMPROVEMENT IN THE LAST DECADE AND THAT MEMBERS OF  
THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION ARE NOT SUBJECT TO PERSECU-  
TION OR HARASSMENT ON THAT ACCOUNT BY THE GOVERN-  
MENT OF IRAQ. ANY INCONVENIENCES WHICH MAY BE  
SUFFERED BY MEMBERS OF THE CHRISTIAN MINORITY OR  
OTHER MINORITIES IN IRAQ APPEARS TO BE THE RESULT  
OF PREJUDICE IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES AND TO HAVE  
NEITHER THE APPROVAL NOR THE TOLERANCE OF THE  
GOVERNMENT. THAT OPINION IS SHARED BY OTHER  
MEMBERS OF THE DIPLOMATIC CORPS IN BAGHDAD,  
INCLUDING THE PAPAL NUNCIO. WE, THEREFORE, DO NOT  
BELIEVE ANY OF THIS GROUP OF IRAQIS HAD ANY REASON  
TO FEAR PERSECUTION BECAUSE OF THEIR RELIGION PRIOR  
TO THEIR DEPARTURE FROM THAT COUNTRY."

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"HOWEVER, AS A RESULT OF THE PUBLICITY ATTENDING  
THEIR ENTRY INTO THE UNITED STATES AND THE WAY IN  
WHICH IT WAS EFFECTED, AN OFFICIAL OF THE IRAQI  
MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WAS QUOTED AS SAYING  
THAT "IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS INCIDENT DID NOT OCCUR  
BY CHANCE BUT WAS ARRANGED BY VARIOUS QUARTERS, IN  
THE FOREFRONT OF WHICH IS THE ILL-REPUTED AND ILL-  
BEHAVED US CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY..." THE HEAD  
OF THE CENTRAL ADMINISTRATIVE COMMITTEE OF THE AS-  
SYRIAN COMMUNITY IN IRAQ, IN REFERRING TO THESE  
IRAQIS HAS STATED THAT "THIS GROUP OF SUSPICIOUS  
PEOPLE CLAIMING ASYLUM ALLEGING RELIGIOUS PERSECU-  
TIONS ARE GUIDED BY IMPERIALIST AGENTS AND ARE  
USED AS TOOLS IN THE SERVICE OF IMPERIALIST  
SCHEMINGS."

"BASED ON THE PUBLIC CLAIMS BY THE GOVERNMENT OF  
IRAQ THAT THE CIA WAS BEHIND THIS GROUP'S ACTION  
AND OTHER ACRIMONIOUS IRAQI PRESS ACCOUNTS, IT IS  
POSSIBLE THAT THESE IRAQIS MIGHT BE TARGETS OF  
PROLONGED INTERROGA IONS AND POSSIBLE ARREST OR  
DETENTION IF RETURNED TO IRAQ. FOR THIS REASON,

IT IS OUR VIEW THAT THESE THIRTY-FOUR IRAQIS SHOULD  
NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO IRAQ."

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3. FYI - WE HAD CONSIDERED ASKING USINT TO MAKE CLEAR  
THAT UNLESS IRAQ WERE PREPARED EITHER TO PUBLICLY  
RETRACT EARLIER STATEMENTS OR GIVE SPECIFIC ASSURANCES,  
WHICH WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC DURING EXCLUSION PROCEEDINGS,  
THAT EACH OF THE 34 IRAQI CHRISTIANS CAN SAFELY RETURN  
TO IRAQ WITHOUT BEING SUBJECT TO INTIMIDATION, HARAS-  
SMENT, OR REPRISALS, WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO INFORM  
THE INS THAT THEY SHOULD NOT BE FORCIBLY RETURNED TO  
IRAQ. SUCH ASSURANCES AS IRAQ FOREIGN MINISTRY MIGHT  
GIVE, HOWEVER, WOULD NOT BE CREDIBLE AND WOULD COUNT  
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FOR NOTHING WITH INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY APPARATUS.  
END FYI.

4. FYI - SINCE GOI PUBLIC REACTION WAS DIRECTED SOLELY  
TO THIS SPECIFIC GROUP, THIS CIRCUMSTANCE EASILY DIS-  
TINGUISHES THIS GROUP FROM OTHER IRAQIS WHO HAVE SOUGHT  
ASYLUM IN U.S. WE WILL CONTINUE TO REVIEW SUCH REQUESTS  
ON A CASE BY CASE BASIS. THIS DECISION NOT TO FORCIBLY  
REPATRIATE THIS GROUP OF 34 DOES NOT SIGNAL A POLICY  
CHANGE IN CONSIDERING OTHER IRAQI ASYLUM APPLICATIONS.  
END FYI.

5. FOR BAGHDAD - WE WILL PROVIDE GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCT-  
IONS ABOUT INFORMING GOI OF OUR POSITION IN ADVANCE OF  
OUR ANSWER TO THE IRAQI DIPLOMATIC NOTE (STATE 66570)  
ON THIS SUBJECT. WE SEE NO NEED AT THIS TIME TO  
APPROACH THE GOI. COOPER

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## Message Attributes

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